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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

PURPOSING SELF *VERSUS* POTENT SOUL: A DISCUSSION OF PROFESSOR WARREN'S "STUDY OF PURPOSE"

THERE is ever-increasing need to distinguish between vitalism, a philosophical doctrine upheld by a strong minority of modern biologists, and self-psychology, the theory of those who believe that psychology studies not primarily mental processes or functions or modes of behavior, but a functioning, behaving self. The two doctrines are alike in their opposition to a mechanistic conception of psychology; but there the agreement ends. For the heart of vitalism is its metaphysical conception of a soul, or entelechy, which guides the organism in its growth and functioning, whereas self-psychology—which is science, not philosophy—deals with the experienced self to which it attributes neither freedom, nor a peculiar potency, nor guiding force. The belief that one has deprived psychology of the self when one has purged biology of the vitalist's entelechy, or soul, is responsible for the intrusion, from an opposite direction, of philosophy into psychology. An instance of this mechanistic metaphysic, confusing strictly psychological issues, I find in Professor Warren's notable "Study of Purpose."¹

Dr. Warren analyzes conscious purpose into five main factors: (1) "*forethought*," which may be concrete or symbolic, complete or syncopated (pp. 10 ff.); (2) "*assent*," or "consciousness of intention, decision, or volition" which distinguishes purpose from mere imagination of the future (pp. 12 ff.); (3) "*potency feeling*," which accompanies the assent only "in complex purposes which involve deliberation" (pp. 16 ff.); (4) "*the self-factor*," usually implicit, shown to be present by the consideration that "the thought of an act is not purposive unless the thinker himself is concerned in accomplishing it" (pp. 21 ff.); and (5) "*the sense of fitness and unfitness* . . . frequently associated with the perception of the completed situation" (pp. 22 ff.). It will be noted that the first, second, and fourth factors enumerated in this singularly adequate analysis of purpose—forethought, assent, and the self-factor—are, it is implied, always

¹ This JOURNAL, Vol. XIII., pp. 5 ff., 29 ff., 57 ff.

present, whereas potency-feeling and the sense of fitness are rightly described as occasionally or "frequently," not invariably, present.

In the face of this analysis it is surprising to find that Professor Warren reaches the conclusions that purpose is a mechanical category. The considerations on which he bases this doctrine are, in the main, the following:

1. He first virtually reduces the potency-feeling, assent, and the feeling of self, all three, to kinesthetic, sometimes supplemented by organic, sensations. "The self-factor may be traced," he says, "to kinesthetic elements" (p. 22²); "in the potency-feeling," he declares he discovers "no element but the kinesthetic data" (p. 20³); "if we analyze the assent-factor," he says, "we find that it consists of kinesthetic and organic data" (p. 13³).

It is, however, impossible to accept unquestioningly these conclusions. To begin with: the description of assent and self-feeling as mere sensational complexes tallies oddly with the actual terms in which Warren himself describes these experiences. Thus, he refers to assent as "our attitude" (p. 13²) and to the self-factor as the consciousness that "the individual himself is directly concerned in the outcome" (p. 9). But this is the language of self-psychology; and had Professor Warren eschewed these terms and described assent, potency-feeling, and the self-factor solely as complexes of sensation and affection he would certainly have failed to distinguish one from the other and to achieve his peculiarly illuminating and accurate account of purpose. The reduction of volition to sensational and affective elements is, furthermore, diametrically opposed not only to the incidental introspection of such psychologists as Dürr² and James,³ but to the experimentally controlled observations of the subjects of Michotte and Prüm and of Ach. These observers constantly reported the consciousness of the assenting, willing *I*, or self, as an experience "totally different from" mere kinesthetic and organic sensation.⁴

2. Professor Warren's second reason for adopting the mechanical conception of purpose may perhaps be contrasted with the first as a biological, not a specifically psychological, consideration. He believes that two of the factors of purpose, as he has just described it—the anticipation and the adaptation—characterize the merely reflex responses of animal organisms and he concludes that human purpose should be classified as a sub-form of this anticipatory, but purely mechanical, behavior.

² *Die Lehre von der Aufmerksamkeit*, 1907, pp. 73 ff.

³ *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. II., p. 569.

⁴ Cf. Michotte et Prüm, "Étude Expérimentale sur le choix Volontaire," *Archives de Psychologie*, X., 1911, pp. 113 ff., esp. p. 192; N. Ach, *Über den Willensakt und das Temperament*, 1910, esp. pp. 240 ff.

It is important to understand precisely what Warren means by "anticipatory behavior," for this is the pivot of his theory. He describes it as response to a stimulus not yet present, involving "inversion" of the usual temporal order (pp. 30 ff.); and illustrates it by the reactions of a baby to the breast, of a chicken to a grain of corn, and of a raccoon to a maze. "When," he says, "a raccoon is placed in a familiar maze and starts to traverse it, his locomotor adjustments are in part a reaction to the subsequent taste stimuli of the food lying at the far end. . . . When a chicken pecks at a grain of corn it is starting the food-assimilating reaction before the food is touched. In the human infant the sucking act involves a chain of reflexes . . . not fully understood till we study the feeding behavior as a whole. . . . All these forms of behavior are anticipatory; they are reactions . . . before the stimulus is wholly present" (p. 33). An obvious infelicity in this theory is the fact that it is obliged to ignore, or to treat as "incidental accompaniments" (p. 71²), three of the five factors—assent, potency-feeling and the self-factor—which Warren, by his initial study, had attributed to the purposive consciousness. And, by Warren's own admission, it must conceive a fourth factor, adaptation, as at once a characteristic of the purposive activity of organisms (pp. 41 ff., 71 ff.) and yet as "*a judgment made by the scientist* and not a quality inherent in creatures and activities" (pp. 45¹, 62, 71 end). But the decisive objection to the theory is the fact that the mechanical animal reflexes which it conceives as anticipatory of reactions to future stimuli and, for this reason, inversions of the usual temporal order never are anticipatory except as supplemented by consciousness,—that of the actor or of the observer. Professor Warren's comparison of these reactions-to-future-stimuli to the "reflex mechanisms of distant receptors," to light and to olfactory stimuli is at best only an analogy; for, as mere mechanism, no organism can be conceived as reacting to future, that is, to as yet non-existing stimuli, so, when Warren says that the reactions of raccoon, chicken, and baby "have reference to," "find meaning in," future stimuli—his statements, though unquestionably correct, are no longer applicable to unconsciously reacting organisms. For only a self, never a mechanism, can "find meaning" or "anticipate." And the temporal order of reaction and food-getting is reversed not in any physical way, but only in somebody's consciousness. Thus, anticipatoriness no less than adaptation is shown to be a psychical, not a mechanical, category; and the conception of human purpose as a form of mechanical behavior is herewith discredited.

But though Professor Warren is, in the opinion of the present writer, unsuccessful and even inconsistent in his doctrine of anticipatory behavior, he abundantly makes good his case against vitalism.

He rightly insists that the unprejudiced introspector finds no trace, in the experience of purpose, of a "directing entelechy" (p. 36²) or of a "dynamic initiator" (p. 48). Against every effort of vitalistic metaphysics to ground itself on psychological observation he spiritedly and rightly protests. In particular, he insists (p. 20³) that the "feeling of potency" does not assure the achievement of a purpose and does not argue for freedom of will. To be sure, he seems curiously unaware that a mechanistic as well as a vitalistic metaphysic is out of place in psychology; but he is still amply justified in his protest against "the extension of such notions as indeterminism and compulsion to the sphere of biological processes." We are concerned, however, at the end as at the beginning, to point out that this banishment of the vitalist's soul, or entelechy, leaves intact the experiencing self which Professor Warren's own analysis of purpose has so clearly disclosed.

MARY WHITON CALKINS.

WELLESLEY COLLEGE.

SOCIETIES

THE SIXTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION¹

THE sixteenth annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association was held in New York City, Wednesday and Thursday, December 27 and 28, in acceptance of the invitation of Columbia University. This act of courtesy on the part of Columbia University was appreciated by the members of the association, especially because the holding of the meeting in New York City afforded a welcome opportunity to its members to attend some of the sessions of the American Psychological Association and of the various other learned societies assembled in the city during Christmas week. The interest in the celebration of the Psychological Association was particularly keen. However, these opportunities had the effect of decreasing in some measure the attendance upon the sessions of the Philosophical Association and led to the curtailment of the meeting. The meager audience assembled when the first session was called to order by Presi-

¹ The writer of this report wishes to acknowledge his obligations to Mr. Herbert Schneider, fellow in philosophy in Columbia University, for the assistance in the preparation of this report afforded by his notes on the meeting. These notes were taken at the writer's request. Without Mr. Schneider's help, even so fragmentary an account as this could hardly have been given; for the speed at which some of the papers were read, made the taking of notes difficult, and the lack of abstracts in the case of other papers rendered necessary the taking of rather full notes.